

CHAPTER XII.

THIS saying of Boris Godunof's puzzled me not a little. It was easy, indeed, to understand that he foresaw danger for Amy from Tsar Ivan, and through him from his son also; for who that lived about the Court of Cæsar could say that he stood not in peril of his life or freedom? For the Cæsar's actions the Cæsar was accountable to no one; upon his love for man or for woman, that it would last for this period or for that, or outlive the passion of one moment of fury, no person could rely.

"Your Anglichanka does not know this," said Godunof, when I questioned him further. "She trusts too much to the magic of her beauty; with Ivan this is not safe—tell her so. It will suffice her for three offences, or for ten, may-be, but at the eleventh he will suddenly turn upon her; let her be warned of this."

"But what of the Nagoys?" I demanded of him. "Danger from the Tsar is a standing dish

for all who are about his person — that is an obvious matter; but what of the Nagoys?"

Godunof frowned and shook his head. "Find out for thyself, my friend," he said. "Soon enough you will understand. Meanwhile, if you bear me any gratitude for the warning I have given you, or at least bear me no ill, forget who gave thee either this hint or that, while remembering the substance."

"I do not understand," I said. "Your head is higher than the Nagoys: why should you fear for them?"

"You would know too much," he replied. "I am sorry I spoke to you; I see that my words will yet be a danger to me."

"Stay, you may trust me—I will be discreet," I protested. "Tell me now about these Nagoys. I do not understand why they are to be feared. I have not discovered that either of the brothers has as yet honoured my friend with the slightest attention, and if they had she is well able to——"

Godunof laughed.

"You hunt the hare instead of the wolf," he said. "Nay, I will say no more; forget me as the sayer, I pray you."

When I knew Boris Godunof better, I learned

that, being a schemer of the very first rank, his character was the most subtle imaginable. No snake would creep towards its object more cautiously than he. Doubtless even in this warning to myself he had in view some object of importance to his own ends, though no thought of this occurred to me at the time.

I was, however, anxious to understand why Amy must beware of these Nagoy, and with the object of satisfying my curiosity I went to Muirhead.

"So!" said he, "the hare runs that way, then, again? I thought—but stop, who told thee? One that knew?"

"I am not to name my informant—I have promised—if there is anything to know, I should say that he may well know it."

"This is a hare that ran before Lady Mary Hastings," he laughed; "the hunt was long since thrown up—from the day, indeed, that this new scent crossed the trail. Yes, I understand the warning. If the Tsar——"

"Muirhead, for the love of Heaven, remember that I know nothing of thy hares and huntings; my thoughts cannot keep pace with your own."

"Pardon!" he laughed, "I will explain. Before it occurred to the Cæsar in his wisdom to

send over sea for a bride unseen, he went near to deciding upon a lady nearer home, one Maria Nagoy, the sister of that young Nagoy who travelled with thee; this Maria was suddenly thrown over in order that the Cæsar might marry a foreign wife and thereby ally himself with our good Queen Bess. Then followed his disappointment, and with it has come the revival of the hopes of Maria Nagoy; she——"

"I understand!" I cried, the light breaking upon me; "why, Muirhead, this may be good news, not bad! May the Lord send this Maria Nagoy all success and the fulfilment of her ambition, and that quickly!"

Muirhead smiled. "Nevertheless," he said, "the warning is useful. We deal, my friend—if I may call myself your friend and hers—with one whose temperament is as little to be counted upon as the Cæsar's itself. She has, as we are both well aware, vowed to tame the Tsar; that means, mark you, that she will use every feminine art to subdue his heart and to bring him to her feet. Whether she succeed or fail—and God grant she fails!—the jealousy of the Nagoy will meanwhile remain a standing danger."

"But Amy would never ally herself to this

man, even though he prayed at her feet for her love."

"That may or may not be true; how do we know what she would do? Her present idea is to tame the bear and then escape—a matter of frightful danger, mark you—but when a Cæsar pleads who shall say beforehand that a maiden will do this or do that? It is a difficult matter to refuse an offered crown; how many women in this world's history have so done?"

"Let Amy be the very first, but she would refuse it. When was there such another king that offered it? As soon she would mate with a tiger or any other great beast. If there were serious danger of any kind from these Nagoyes, they might be told this?"

"The tale would go straight to the Tsar, be very sure of it! And then where would our poor Amy Romalyn be? No, my friend, by every means let her go back to England with Sir Jerome, and the sooner the better. The Nagoyes are a danger, though one that may be guarded against. It is the Cæsar himself who is a danger against which no man may guard—the pestilence that walketh at noonday and at night-time. Let her go, man, let her go."

"It is easy to say, 'Let her go,' Muirhead;

how should I or any other man persuade her if she will not?"

"Compel her," said Muirhead. Whereupon we both laughed, though for my part there was not much mirth in my laughter.

Meanwhile that happened which was of the worst possible augury for the success of any arguments that I might address to Amy in order to induce her to return to England.

The Tsar Ivan sent for Amy to the audience-chamber.

This time his Grace did not avert his eyes, but gazed in the girl's face as she entered, and continued to look upon her with the fixed, intent look which was a characteristic of the man when interested. His son the Cæsarevitch, dutiful child of his father, stared at Amy with equal fixity.

"I have sent for thee, Amy Romalyn," said the Tsar, "in order to tell thee that Sir Bowes will leave Moscow in two weeks from this day."

Amy flushed and inclined her head, but said nothing.

"I have reflected," the Cæsar continued, "that this is short notice for thee—I would not seem inhospitable—it may be to thy desire to see more of my country?"

Amy, with a reverence, declared that she could well prepare herself for departure in a fortnight.

"It is not my will," said Ivan shortly, an angry look passing like a flash across his face.

"There is no reason that I should remain," said Amy; "I will depart with Sir Jerome."

"I have reflected," the Tsar continued, "that to return thee to the Queen, thy cousin, would be shameful to thee."

Amy's eyes flashed; the speech angered her.

"It may be," she said, "that her Grace will not be surprised to see me back. I made the Queen no promise to remain in Muscovy."

"How couldst thou know beforehand what should be my mind in this matter? Or was the Queen well aware that she acted unfriendly towards me? If so, her offence is the greater."

"I will tell thee truly, Tsar," said Amy. "Her Grace, my mistress, is in no wise to blame for my coming, nor yet for the not coming of my cousin, Mary Hastings. I came because I would come. 'I will go in the place of Mary,' I said, 'if she is afraid to venture, though I will not promise to stay in the lion's den.'"

"Does the Lion of Muscovy roar so loud that he is heard at the Queen's Court?" said Ivan.

"Mary Hastings was a fool: the lion can turn lamb when he will."

Amy said nothing.

"Then thou camest of thy own will; thou art a rash maiden. Well, stay, since thou hast dared so much to come—the lion will not eat thee, though he will mate where he pleases. I will not send thee away; Sir Bowes shall tell his mistress that I have allowed thee to remain awhile."

"Nay, I will depart, Tsar," said Amy.

"There are boyars at the Court whose blood ran, like my own, in the veins of Rurik; I will give thee as good a husband as thou shalt find in England, as rich and almost royal."

Amy made a quick grimace. "As to husbands, I desire none of them," she said; "may I not follow the example of your Grace, and mate where I please?"

"Thou art a saucy minx," said Ivan, actually laughing. "Come, I desire thee to stay awhile in my country. Wouldst thou refuse the Tsar's hospitality?"

I, standing in a group of men, next to Bowes, blurted out at this, speaking in English:—

"Amy, for God's sake beware how you answer!" The Tsar half turned his head

impatiently towards me, but kept his eyes fixed upon Amy.

Amy took no notice of my warning.

"If the Tsar himself desires it, that is a different matter," she replied smiling.

"I do desire it," he replied. Then he turned upon us with an angry face. "Who dared to interrupt when the Tsar spoke?" he asked, and I stepped forward.

"So, it was thou, long fellow! Thy manners are ill—little better than thy master's" (meaning Sir Jerome); "and what, pray, didst thou say?"

"I warned her beware how she replied," I said.

"Which signified what?"

"That is as the lady understood it," I faltered; and Amy interrupted:—

"He is right, Tsar; he bade me be careful how I replied, for we are both servants of the Queen, our mistress, whose will in this matter must of course be considered. I had so considered it, unknown to him, beforehand, and therefore I replied to your Grace as I did."

"Good!" said Ivan; "nevertheless, Sir Bowes, see that this long fellow departs with thee when thou returnest; I like not his bearing

any more than thy own." Sir Jerome bowed but said nothing; since his first adventure with the Tsar he had held little converse with him, being perhaps somewhat ashamed of his rudeness. The Tsar rose and withdrew, casting a final glance over his shoulder at Amy. Seeing that his son did likewise, he said something angrily to him as they disappeared.

Amy now departed, and I followed as quickly as might be, intending to overtake her in the corridor, if possible, for I must speak with her. As I shouldered my way through the group of persons at the door, I caught sight of young Nagoy, my travelling companion from Archangel. His face was convulsed with rage, and his eyes, as they followed Amy's departing figure, were ablaze with a very ugly light.